proposal from the Government of Kerala for setting up of new Post Offices in the State;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the action taken by the Government thereon;

(c) whether any proposals are under consideration of the Government for upgradation of Post Offices in the State;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether the Government propose to introduce Speed Post Service in the State, and

(f) if so, the details thereof, district-wise?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : Yes, Sir.

(b) Four proposals were received from the Government of Kerala for opening of new Post Offices. Two proposals, namely Kunnathukal in Trichur District and Mannamaruthy in Pathanamthitta District were not found justified on Departmental norms. Other two proposals namely West Koratty in Trichur District and Nattukallu in Quilon District are under examination.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) Following five proposals for upgradation of Post Offices are under examination.

1. Malayalapuzha-Thazham in Pathanamthitta District
2. Kunnathur East in Pathanamthitta District
3. Mundakkal in Quilon District
4. Nedumpana in Quilon District
5. Ekarool in Kozhikode District

(e) and (f) Speed Post Service already exists in Kerala. Kottayam, Kochi, Kollam, Thiruvananathapuram, Aluva, Kozhikode and Trissur are under National Network of Speed Post Service.

[English]

Old Persons

1839. SHRI SUSHIL CHANDRA: Will the Minister of WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) the percentage of persons of more than 60 and 70 years of age and the total numbers thereof;

(b) the number and location of old age ashrams set up in the country for these aged persons who have not been given shelter in their own houses, State/Union Territory-wise;

(c) whether any ashram is being run directly by the Government;

(d) if so, the details alongwith the location thereof, and

(e) the provision made for financial assistance to the non-Governmental agencies for setting up old age ashrams?

THE MINISTER OF WELFARE (SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA) : (a) Proportion of population of aged persons over 60 years was 6.2 percent as per 1981 Census. The age-wise data based on 1991 Census is under compilation by the Registrar General of India. However, Standing Committee on Population had estimated in 1989 the proportion of population of aged persons (60 plus) in 1991 as 6.5 percent.

(b) to (d). The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

(e) A budget provision of Rs. 700 crores has been made for the year 1996-97 under the Scheme of Assistance to Voluntary Organisations for Programmes relating to Aged for running Old Age Homes, Day Care Centres, Mobile Medicare Units and Non-Institutional Services for the Aged.

[English]

Public Distribution System

1840. SHRI RAMESH CHENNITHALA: Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government of Kerala has opposed the move for the reported changes being made in the Public Distribution System;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor, and

(c) the reaction of the Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV) : (a) to (c). The recently concluded Conference of Chief Ministers held on 4th and 5th July, 1996, which was also attended by the Chief Minister, Kerala, welcomed the proposal to streamline the Public Distribution System (PDS) with focus on the population Below Poverty Line (BPL) and issue of foodgrains to them at specially subsidised prices. The Conference, however, felt that as a large section of the population, who may be above the poverty line are also at present getting the benefit of the Public Distribution System, suitable measures should be taken to ensure availability of essential commodities at reasonable prices to this section. The Conference suggested that before finalising the Below Poverty Line Population, the States should be consulted.

Government is working out the details on Streamlining the PDS in consultation with the States Governments.

Improvement of Telecom Services

1841. SHRI MOHAN RAWALE: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the attention of the Government have been drawn to the news-item appearing in The Indian